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GUIDE
FOR
PERFORMANCE EVALUATION AND RATING

FOR USE BY
RATING OFFICIALS AND SUPERVISORS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE
PERSONNEL DIVISION
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GUIDE FOR PERFORMANCE EVALUATION AND RATING
(For Use by Rating Officials and Supervisors)

I PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

The effectiveness of the Performance Rating Plan is dependent upon the extent to which it and the information derived from it are used for the purpose of improving employee performance, personnel management practices and program operations. This Guide is provided for the use of ARS supervisors and rating officials in carrying out the performance rating plan. The use of this device will help those in supervisory positions to do a better job of supervision through careful evaluation of employee performance. Its use should result in improved work performance, better use of employee skills, and improved supervisor-employee relationships.

II PERFORMANCE RATING PLAN

A copy of the ARS Performance Rating Plan is attached to AM 462.1 as Exhibit B.

III OFFICIAL PERFORMANCE RATINGS

The term "performance rating" will apply to all ratings throughout ARS. These will be known as "official" ratings. There is no authority for making "administrative-unofficial" ratings or special ratings under the ARS Performance Rating Plan. This, however, will not preclude the making of supervisory evaluation reports or other forms of employee evaluations for use in connection with career-service promotion and employee development programs, or in the case of employees serving under probationary or trial period appointments. Each performance rating will be an official evaluation of the employee's work performance based on previously established performance requirements which are mutually understood by the employee and his supervisor. At the time of rating a summary evaluation is made, and an adjective rating assigned, both of which shall be discussed with the employee concerned. The official rating shall be recorded on memorandum form, 'Notice of Performance Rating', Form PD-62 (copy attached).

IV WHO MUST BE RATED

All employees of ARS holding formal appointment on either a permanent or indefinite basis, or for a period not limited to one year or less, come within the scope of the Performance Rating Plan, with the following exceptions:

Non-Federally-controlled and cooperatively-controlled agents.

Persons employed without compensation (WOC).

Persons employed on a fee or contract basis.

Employees outside the continental limits of the United States who are paid in accordance with local native prevailing wage rates for the area in which employed.

The Performance Rating Plan provides for three kinds of performance ratings. These are:

A "Satisfactory" Rating. Work performance will be considered "Satisfactory" when an employee meets the requirements of the essential duties of his position, but does not achieve outstanding performance in all phases of his work. The great majority of employees will fall in this category, even though there may be a considerable variation in the quality and quantity of work performed.

B "Outstanding" Rating. Work performance will be considered "Outstanding" when an employee performs each and every one of his duties in a manner that not only exceeds normal requirements, but is outstanding and deserving of special commendation. It is not enough to perform some of the duties or the most important duties in an outstanding way; it is necessary that all aspects of performance be done in such an outstanding way as to merit special commendation. The procedure to be followed in recommending a rating of "Outstanding" is set out in IX-A-2 below.

C "Unsatisfactory" Rating. Work performance will be considered "Unsatisfactory" only when, after a fair and full trial, an employee's performance of one or more of his essential duties substantially fails to meet the requirements established for such duty or duties. A performance rating of "Unsatisfactory" constitutes a basis for removal of an employee from his position. Ratings of "Unsatisfactory" may be made at any time during the rating period. The procedure to be followed in recommending a rating of "Unsatisfactory" is set out in IX-A-3 below.

VI WHEN RATINGS WILL BE MADE

A Annual Date. Performance ratings will be made annually as of 10/31 for all employees of ARS, subject to the qualifications enumerated in B, C, D and E below. The presumptive ratings of "Satisfactory" mentioned will be recorded only as needed for official purposes.

B Employees Transferred to ARS through Reorganization. If on the first rating date for ARS employees, viz: 10/31/54 a rating as of that date will result in a period of time greater than one year since the previous rating date (either annual or anniversary), the previous rating will carry over for the remainder of the time beyond one year until the 10/31/54 rating is made, as required in A immediately above.

C New Employees.

1 Probationary or Trial Period Employees. New employees appointed without time limitation, and who are serving a probationary or trial period, shall be given a presumptive rating of "Satisfactory" at time of appointment, with subsequent ratings at the end of six months on the job, and again one month prior to the end of the probationary or trial period. Employees serving a probationary or trial period may be separated

during such period without having received an official performance rating or a 90-day warning notice. After the six- and eleven-month ratings have been made, these employees will be rated annually if they have completed three months or more of service in their positions. New employees serving a probationary or trial period will not be rated prior to expiration of the six-month period even though the annual rating date intervenes.

2 Transferred or Reinstated Employees. New employees appointed without time limitation by transfer reinstatement, or in lieu of transfer or reinstatement, and who because of prior Federal service do not serve a probationary or trial period, shall be given a presumptive rating of "Satisfactory" at time of appointment. These employees will be rated annually if they have completed three months or more of service in their positions.

D Employees Reassigned. Employees reassigned within ARS shall be given a presumptive rating of "Satisfactory", which shall be the official rating for the period ending with the regular annual rating date. If a reassignment occurs within the three-month period prior to the regular rating date, a regular rating shall be given at the end of three months of service in the position to which reassigned. Those employees whose work assignments have been so changed as to require the issuance of a Notification of Personnel Action (SF-50) shall be considered as having been "reassigned".

E Unsatisfactory Service After Rating. If, during a rating period, an employee is issued a 90-day warning notice that his performance has become unsatisfactory, and the warning period expires before the annual rating date, the performance rating will be made at the end of the warning period. "Unsatisfactory" ratings may be made at any time during the rating year after the 90-day warning period has elapsed.

VII SERVICE TO BE CONSIDERED

A performance rating must be based on not less than three months of service. It must be an evaluation of work performance based on performance requirements of the position occupied by the employee on the date of the rating. It shall cover all service since entrance on duty in the position, or since the date of the last official rating, whichever is later.

A Service in Same Grade and Same Performance Requirements. If, during the rating period, an employee has moved from one position to another position of the same grade and kind of work having the same performance requirements, service in both positions shall be considered, provided it is practical for the rating official to do so, and that he can obtain from other supervisory officials an evaluation of the employee's performance in his former position.

B Change in Assignment. If, during the rating period, an employee has moved from one position to another having different performance requirements, only service in the latter position may be considered.

C Notice of Unsatisfactory Service. If an employee is given a warning notice of "Unsatisfactory" service within three months of the annual rating date, the rating may not be made, but must be deferred until the end of the warning period.

VIII PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS

A What is a Performance Requirement? A performance requirement may be defined as an action or actions by an employee which are necessary to perform a specific job adequately. Within the framework of overall objectives, policies, regulations and work situations, the requirements of a specific job are those duties and tasks which are expected of the employee to insure satisfactory work performance.

B Establishing Performance Requirements. The Performance Rating Plan does not require that performance requirements be maintained in written form. However, rating officials are encouraged to use written performance requirements for positions under their supervision. Whether written or oral, performance requirements should be presented in simple and realistic terms. Requirements shall be so established and applied as to bring about and maintain a clear understanding between the employee and his rating official of the quality and quantity of work required of him, and of the manner in which it is to be performed. An employee may not be rated as deficient on any performance requirement that was not made known to him or which he did not have a fair opportunity to comply with. It is necessary that the employee and the supervisor have a common understanding of the performance requirements for the particular job. If an employee does not agree with the established requirements, they should be put in writing and a copy given to the employee. Written requirements are necessary to justify a rating of other than "Satisfactory."

1 Use of Position Description. The official position description should be reviewed, and if current and accurate in all substantial respects, should adequately serve to identify the duties and responsibilities of the employee for the purpose of establishing performance requirements. It should be understood, however, that the position description is not intended nor does it attempt to define in detail each and every aspect, duty and task which may properly be assigned to the employee.

2 Use of Official Regulations and Instructions. Official regulations and procedural instructions issued to govern the conduct of work operations may be used in conjunction with the approved position description as a basis for the establishment of performance requirements.

3 Determining Requirements. Performance requirements should consist of a reasonable range of performance, with a minimum point below which work would be unacceptable, and a maximum point which would be a real challenge to the average worker. They should not necessarily be based upon the level attained by the position's present occupant, as the performance of this employee may be more or less than adequate. In setting requirements, consideration should be given to the working conditions affecting the employee's performance.

4 Changes in Requirements. Performance requirements may change as equipment and work methods and procedures change, or as the employee develops. They may be different for the trainee from that for the seasoned worker. Requirements for the trainee should be set at levels which will allow the average worker to feel as soon as possible that he is progressing at a reasonable pace.

5 Discussing Requirements. Performance requirements whether oral or written should be explained to the new employee as soon as possible after he reports to the job. At this time the employee usually can do little to help in setting requirements. If, however, he has done similar work, he may have ideas that are worth considering. In some cases the supervisor may want to explain only general requirements at first, and cover requirements for specific tasks as the employee learns these tasks. One way to be sure the employee understands and agrees with the requirements he is expected to meet is to have him help to determine them. One of the basic principles of the Performance Rating Plan is that employees be advised of the performance requirements of their respective positions. The importance of this principle is emphasized by its inclusion as a specific requirement in the Performance Rating Act of 1950, and the additional requirement that a performance rating maybe given only in relation to performance requirements which have been made known to the employee.

C Essential Features of Performance Requirements. In summary, performance requirements whether oral or written must--

1 Be attainable and should establish "satisfactory" performance under normal supervision. Otherwise employees cannot be separated into "Satisfactory", "Unsatisfactory", or "Outstanding" groups.

2 Be developed and established jointly with the employee concerned, if practicable. In some instances it will be impracticable to develop jointly the performance requirements of certain field employees reporting to supervisors at other geographical locations. In such cases, the supervisor and employee will arrive at a common understanding of the performance requirements through correspondence and field visits.

3 Be based upon analysis of the position for which the performance requirements are being developed. This requires a thorough study of the duties and responsibilities of the position.

4 Be complete and cover all the important normal duties of the given position, and be kept up-to-date.

5 Be consistent with requirements for similar or comparable positions elsewhere in the organization, and be able to stand up under review on appeal or inspection.

IX ASSIGNMENT OF RATINGS

A General Procedure. At the time a performance rating is due, and within ten days thereafter if possible, the supervisor should hold a rating

conference with the employee being rated. He will review with him the official description of his duties and responsibilities, each item of his performance requirements, and inform him how well he has performed during the period covered, and in what specific respects he can make improvements. The overall adjective rating will be determined, and the supervisor and employee concerned will complete the Notice of Performance Rating, Form PD-62 in duplicate. The signature of the supervisor and the employee must appear on the notification of rating. The certification by the employee does not constitute acceptance of the rating by him. Any changes found necessary in the position description should be brought to the attention of the Personnel Division, through appropriate channels.

Since it will seldom be possible for employees reporting directly to supervisory officials at other geographical locations, to discuss orally performance requirements and assigned ratings at the time the ratings are made, it will be necessary for their rating officials to complete and sign both copies of Form PD-62, Notice of Performance Rating, and transmit them to the persons being rated for their signature, after which the employees concerned will return the carbon copy of the notice of rating to the appropriate point for recording and filing in the official personnel folder, unless a rating of "Outstanding" or "Unsatisfactory" is being proposed. The procedure in such cases is covered in 2 and 3 below.

1 Employee Rated As "Satisfactory". If the rating is "Satisfactory" no review is required except in the event of an appeal. The supervisor shall deliver to the employee the signed original of Form PD-62, Notice of Performance Rating, and send the signed copy through appropriate channels for recording on personnel records and filing in the official personnel folder.

2 Employee Recommended for Rating of "Outstanding". A recommended rating of "Outstanding" shall be supported by a written statement in seven copies setting forth in detail the facts justifying the assignment of the proposed rating. It shall contain (1) a statement of the employee's official duties; (2) a statement of the performance requirements of the particular position; and (3) a factual description of the circumstances wherein the employee has exceeded all of the requirements of the position in such a way as to warrant his selection for an "Outstanding" rating. It is most important that rating officials recommending a rating of "Outstanding" fully satisfy themselves that the performance of the employee concerned meets the requirements for such a rating, as outlined in the Plan and in this Guide. Higher level officials may attach to the rating official's statement of justification additional statements (in seven copies) setting forth their own comments and recommendations in the case. All copies of the statements of justification considered and signed at each supervisory level within the division or branch concerned, and both copies of Form PD-62, Notice of Performance Rating, signed by the rating official shall be forwarded to "PD" for consideration by and recommendation of the ARS Efficiency Awards Committee. After consideration by the Administrator, or his designated representative, PD will return Form PD-62 through appropriate channels to the employee concerned. A recommended rating of "Outstanding" which is disapproved by the Administrator, or his designated representative, will automatically revert to a rating of "Satisfactory."

3 Employee Recommended for Rating of "Unsatisfactory". An "Unsatisfactory" rating should be given to an employee if his performance

does not meet the requirements for satisfactory performance, after reasonable effort to help him improve. When evaluation of an employee's performance shows that it is not satisfactory in spite of efforts to help him, action to warn and rate him may be taken at any time. An employee may not be rated "Unsatisfactory" without prior written warning of at least 90 days (except in the case of employees serving a trial or probationary period, see VI C above), and a reasonable opportunity after being warned to demonstrate satisfactory performance. The warning period may be extended by the supervisor in a written notice to the employee if, because of absence through illness or other bona fide reasons, the employee does not have a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate satisfactory performance during the original warning period.

a Content of Formal Warning. The written warning notice shall set forth specifically:

- (1) The duties the employee is required to perform.
- (2) The performance requirements of the position.
- (3) The way he is expected to perform these duties and meet the performance requirements of the position; that is, when, how much, how well, and in what way the work should be done.
- (4) Wherein he has failed to perform his duties properly.
- (5) How he may improve his performance.
- (6) That he will be allowed 90 days for such improvement.
- (7) That if his performance does not become fully satisfactory within the time allowed for improvement, he will receive a performance rating of "Unsatisfactory", and that receipt of notice of an "Unsatisfactory" rating will constitute the 30-day advance notice of intent to separate, demote, or reassign.
- (8) That within 15 days following his receipt of notice of "Unsatisfactory" performance rating, he may submit an answer, together with such supporting material as he shall see fit, showing cause why action should not be taken to separate, demote, or reassign him.

The rating official is responsible for issuing the formal written warning notice to an employee whose services are unsatisfactory. A copy of the warning notice shall be sent to PD for review at the time the notice is delivered to the employee. If the review reveals that the 90-day notice does not comply with the above stated requirements, the rating official who issued it will furnish a revised notice to the employee concerned. The 90-day period will then start at the time the revised notice is delivered to the employee.

During the warning period the supervisor must give the employee a reasonable opportunity to meet the performance requirements of his position, and reasonable help and assistance in doing so. He should also discuss with the employee from time to time the progress, if any, he is making.

b Procedure if Services Improve. If, at the end of the period allowed for improvement, the employee's performance has improved to the extent that no adverse action is required, his rating official will:

(1) Make and issue a rating notice of "Satisfactory", and, in not to exceed ten days,

(2) Notify the employee by memorandum that no other action is contemplated, and that no action is required on his part with respect to the "warning" notice.

(3) Forward copies of Form PD-62 and a memorandum of the facts to PD for review, recording and filing in the official personnel folder.

c Procedure if Services do not Improve. If, after proper warning and opportunity to improve, the employee continues to render unsatisfactory service, the rating official at the end of the 90-day warning period shall issue a rating notice of "Unsatisfactory". An "Unsatisfactory" performance rating shall be supported by a written statement specifying wherein the employee's performance is unsatisfactory, the facts surrounding the prior warning, and the efforts made after the warning to enable the employee to bring his performance to a satisfactory level. This statement with both copies of Form PD-62 completed and signed by the rating official (but not necessarily by the employee) shall be forwarded through appropriate channels of the division or branch concerned to PD. Higher level supervisory officials, including the division director or branch chief concerned, shall review the recommendation and statement of justification, and shall attach thereto written statements indicating that the rating official's recommendation has been reviewed and concurred in or disapproved. In cases where higher level superiors disapprove the assignment of a recommended "Unsatisfactory" rating, specific reasons therefor shall be set forth in the forwarding memorandum. They may submit any comments pertinent to a recommendation in which they concur.

After a recommended rating of "Unsatisfactory" has been reviewed and approved or disapproved at the division or branch level, the case will be forwarded to PD for further review and recommendation to the Administrator, or his designated representative. Notification of the Administrator's decision will be sent to the employee through division or branch channels by PD.

PD will attach the following statement to the Form PD-62 which will be a part or the Notice;- "You are hereby notified that 30 days from receipt by you of this Notice, action will be taken, based on the "Unsatisfactory" rating, to separate, demote or reassign you. You have 15 days from receipt of this notice in which to submit a statement, together with such supporting material as you see fit, showing cause why such action should not be taken." To the notice

shall also be attached the statement specifically informing the employee how he has failed to perform his job satisfactorily.

The employee's reply, if one is received within the time allowed, shall be considered, and after consultation with the division or branch concerned, decision will be made whether to separate, demote or reassign him. The employee will be promptly notified of the decision reached in his case.

If the employee appeals his rating within the time allowed (15 days from receipt of the "Unsatisfactory" rating), the personnel action of separation, demotion or reassignment will not be processed until final decision is reached under the administrative appeals procedure or by a statutory Board of Review, or both, as outlined in XIII below.

Following the expiration of the 30-day notice, and pending decision on the final appeal of the rating, the employee shall be kept in a duty status or on furlough without pay.

If the employee's statement in rebuttal of the rating given him is deemed insufficient, or the "Unsatisfactory" rating is sustained on appeal, personnel action for reassignment, demotion or separation shall be taken in not to exceed 30 days. If the employee has veteran's preference rights, the personnel notification shall contain a statement notifying him that nothing in this action shall contravene his right to a further appeal to the Civil Service Commission under Section 14 of the Veterans' Preference Act. Such a personnel notification must reach the employee on or before the effective date of the action.

X HOW PERFORMANCE RATINGS AFFECT PERSONNEL ACTIONS

Performance ratings affect certain personnel actions in the following manner:

A Step Increases. A performance rating of "Satisfactory" or "Outstanding" is required for an employee to be eligible for periodic step increases to the maximum scheduled rate of his classification grade, or for longevity step increases above the maximum scheduled rate of his grade where applicable.

B Grade Promotions. Grade promotions may be granted only to those employees who have a performance rating of "Satisfactory" or "Outstanding" at the time the promotion action is being considered.

C Reductions in Force. When reductions in force are necessary, added retention points are allowed for "Satisfactory" or "Outstanding" performance ratings.

D Separation, Reassignment or Demotion. An employee given a performance rating of "Unsatisfactory" is required to be separated from the position in which his services have been established as unsatisfactory. This separation from position may be by dismissal from the service, or by reassignment or demotion to another position as determined by the Administrator, or his designated representative, upon recommendation of the division or branch concerned.

XI RECORD OF PERFORMANCE RATINGS

The performance rating of each employee shall be recorded on his service record card (SF-7), and a copy of the Notice of Performance Rating, Form PD-62, filed in his official personnel folder. A copy of any documentary evidence on which a rating is approved for "Outstanding" or "Unsatisfactory" shall likewise be filed in his official personnel folder.

XII RESPONSIBILITY FOR ADMINISTRATION OF PERFORMANCE RATINGS

A Responsibility of Rating Officials. The Performance Rating Plan provides that performance ratings shall be made by the supervisor who normally gives the employee his work assignments, advises and consults with him during the course of his work, reviews or approves the work upon completion, and usually has responsibility for the employee's attendance, leave, etc. In many instances the rating official, who must be the first person in authority who has substantial supervisory responsibility, will not perform all of these functions, some of which will, because of organization, operating, or other considerations, be vested in a higher supervisory official. The primary requirement to be observed is that the rating be made by the supervisor who is most closely acquainted with the employee's work performance during the period of time for which the rating is made. In cases of employees who are regularly working under more than one supervisory official, such supervisors may and are encouraged to consult together in determining performance ratings. Only the designated rating official under whom the employee is currently serving will need to sign the rating sheet. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the responsibility for evaluating and rating performance assumes major importance since, except for ratings of "Outstanding" and "Unsatisfactory", action by the rating official is final, and is not subject to further review, except in case of appeal. Proper exercise of the evaluation and rating functions requires that the rating official be the individual who, in conjunction with the employee, establishes the performance requirements of the employee's position.

Responsibilities of rating officials include the following.

- 1 Discussion of Performance Requirements with Employees. Reviewing the position description and discussing the performance requirements with the employee at the time he enters on duty in the position, or as soon thereafter as practicable; at the beginning of a new rating period; and as necessary thereafter in order to make certain that a mutual understanding exists with respect to the manner of performance, and quality and quantity of work required for satisfactory performance.

2 Evaluating Performance. Making the evaluation of the employee's performance at the time the official rating is due, using the performance requirements applicable to the actual duties being performed. The official rating should be the result of a continuous process of supervisory evaluation of employee performance.

3 Discussing Rating with Employees. Discussing the official rating with the employee at the time it is made if the rating is "Satisfactory", or as soon as possible after official approval has been obtained if the rating is "Outstanding" or "Unsatisfactory."

4 Justifying "Outstanding" Ratings. Preparing complete justifications in writing for all recommended performance ratings of "Outstanding".

5 Preparing Warning Notices. Preparing and delivering notices of warning to employees who fail to meet requirements for satisfactory performance in their jobs.

6 Justifying "Unsatisfactory" Ratings. Preparing and transmitting for consideration by the Administrator justifications for "Unsatisfactory" ratings after the warning period has expired.

XIII APPEALS

A From "Unsatisfactory" Rating.

1 Notice of Appeal. An employee who receives a performance rating of "Unsatisfactory" and who wishes to appeal such a rating shall notify the Personnel Division in writing (in duplicate) of his intention to appeal within 15 work-days from the date of receipt of notice of rating. One copy of the appeal letter or memorandum shall be sent to the Director of Personnel of the Department by PD.

2 Committee. A committee shall thereupon be established consisting of a member chosen by the employee, a member chosen by the Administrator, or his designated representative, and a member chosen by the Director of Personnel of the Department who will serve as Chairman. The employee, if he wishes, may also designate a representative to assist him in presenting his case. All members of the Appeals Committee and the employee representative, if any, shall be employees of USDA and subject to the performance rating system, and shall be located as near as possible to the appellant's headquarters location.

3 Hearing by and Recommendation of Committee. The committee shall ascertain all pertinent facts and make a full report and recommendation to the Administrator.

4 Decision. If the Administrator, or his designated representative, concurs in the recommendation of the majority of the committee, his

decision shall be final; and a notice of the decision shall be sent to the employee, with a copy to the Director of Personnel of the Department. If he does not agree with the majority recommendation, he will refer the complete case with a statement of his views to the Director of Personnel of the Department for a decision. The Director of Personnel will send the notice of his decision, in duplicate, to the Administrator, who will in turn send the original to the employee concerned, and retain the copy for the official personnel folder.

5 Further Appeal to Statutory Board of Review. If the employee is not satisfied with the decision on his administrative appeal, he may, within 30 days after receiving notice of the action, make a further appeal to the Statutory Board of Review, which will render a final decision. Such an appeal should be submitted in triplicate and addressed to the appropriate Chairman of the Board of Review. Employees located in Washington, D. C., Beltsville, Maryland, and outside the continental United States should send their appeals to the U. S. Civil Service Commission, Washington 25, D. C. All other employees should send their appeals to the Civil Service Commission regional office for the area in which they are officially headquartered. Specific information concerning this will be furnished the employee at the time he receives the decision on the administrative appeal.

B From "Satisfactory" Rating. An employee who receives a performance rating of "Satisfactory", who wishes to appeal for a rating of "Outstanding" may within 15 days after receipt of notice of rating, submit an administrative appeal to a committee established as in the manner for appeals of "Unsatisfactory" ratings immediately above; or he may, within 30 days appeal to a Statutory Board of Review. He may not, however, use both appeal procedures.

C Availability of USDA Regulations. There shall be available upon request of an employee, Chapter 9 of Title 8, USDA Administrative Regulations or the Field Manual thereof, which contains the administrative regulations with reference to the Performance Rating Act and the USDA Rating Plan.

XIV INFORMING EMPLOYEES

The essential provisions of the Performance Rating Plan, including the appeals procedure, are made known to employees of ARS through information contained in the Employee Handbook (Agriculture Handbook No. 23, Revised), pages 19 and 20.

In orientation programs with new employees, the important elements of the Performance Rating Plan and of this Guide should be discussed and explained. This also should be done in initial discussions with employees concerning performance requirements.

